

**William Short to Thomas Jefferson, January 28,  
1790, from Thomas Jefferson and William Short  
Correspondence, Transcribed and Edited by Gerard W.  
Gawalt, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress**

**William Short to Thomas Jefferson**

Paris, Jan 28. 1790

Dear Sir

My last letter was of the 12th inst. & sent by the French packet from Bordeaux under cover to Mr. Jay. In it I acknowledged the receipt of yours from Lynnhaven bay. I communicated your arrival not only to your friends but those of the young ladies in the convent. I have received from Mll. Botidoux a letter for Miss Jefferson accompanied by a packet containing pamphlets as she told me. The letter will be sent with this. Not knowing whether M. Le Coulteux would be willing to take charge of the packet I sent it to London by Mr. Broome who told me there would be a vessel sailing immediately for N. York. It is addressed to your name, & the care of Mr. Jay. This letter will be sent under cover to Mr. Jay to whose letter I beg leave to refer for some articles of European politics. Knowing that these letters will be open to you, & considering also the possibility of their being yours in virtue of the office to which you have been named I have thought it not necessary to copy them or repeat them here.

In my last to you I mentioned what had been done by the assembly relative to the Parliament of Rennes. The members of the Parliament & their partisans endeavoured to frighten the assembly by asserting that they were supported by the people of their province. Accounts have just arrived here that the people are exempting themselves

## Library of Congress

from that calumny by burning chateaux, & committing those violences, which had ceased there as in the other parts of France, on supposing that the aristocratic party had given up the contest. Volney underwent the day before yesterday a severe shock. You know that he is one of the most violent anti ministerial men. The assembly got an hint that he had accepted from the ministry an appointment in Corsica of Inspector of Commerce with a salary of 12, or 15,000. This was denounced in the assembly & a decree passed extending that made on a former occasion to prevent Mirabeau from

coming into the ministry. Several other members who had accepted places from the ministry have also resigned them in conformity to the decree of the assembly. The question about the rights of Jews had been again brought on. The only circumstance which prevented it being decided in their favor when formerly agitated was the fear of discontenting the people of Alsace and Lorraine where the Jews are so numerous, & where the people are so greatly their debtors, that these two provinces made every exertion to exclude them. The friends of the Jews therefore divided the questions respecting them, & by this division it was decided that the Juifs Portugais et Espagnols were capable of being citoyens actifs sans rien prejurer sur les droits des Juifs Allemands. It is unnecessary to mention that the epithet has nothing to do with the country to which the Jews belong, but decides the sect of which they are. The Juifs Espagnols & Portugais for example have for two or three centuries back inhabited the southern part of France, particularly Bordeaux. The Juifs Allemands have in like manner for a long time been inhabitants of Lorraine & Alsace.

The assembly not long ago passed a decree against the prejudice of families being dishonored by the punishment with death of one of its members. I had often heard much of the force of this prejudice in France, but had no idea of the extravagant excess to which it was carried until I heard the subject lately treated here & exemplified by several historical facts. Immediately after the decree of the assembly an opportunity present itself of giving it eclat. Two brothers here of a very respectable family were condemned by the chatelet to be executed for forgery. Immediately after the sentence was pronounced (it is not yet

## Library of Congress

executed) one of the districts of Paris waited on their President who was brother to the condemned, & who surrounded by his distressed family was deliberating to what part of the world they should fly to hide themselves. They were carried in triumph to the general assembly of the district, the President confirmed in his office, one of his sons immediately appointed lieutenant in the volunteer guards, & another fourteen years of age only, named lieutenant a la suite. M. de la Fayette in order to give additional éclat to this attack on the false prejudice, assembly the division & at the head of them received the two new officers in that capacity & embracing them with tenderness added to the scene a new interest, invited them to his table & at the same time an actor of the Variétés, who being lieutenant in the volunteer guards, first moved that the son should be

named to his place, which he offered to resign, added that he should be too happy to serve under such an officer. His resignation was not accepted. The conduct of the district being announced to the national assembly was received with great applause & the President desired to inform the district of the satisfaction of the assembly.

The question about the qualities of a citizen actif was brought on some days ago by a deputy from L'Artois. He observed that the taxes were laid in that part of France in such a manner that few of the inhabitants paid the direct tax of three days labor, in proportion to the other parts of the kingdom, & consequently that by the decree of the assembly the number of citizens actifs would be far short of the population & the persons eligible to the national assembly so few as to leave little choice to the voters. Several attempts as I mentioned in a former letter had been made to annul the decree relative to the qualities of eligibility to the assembly, but constantly overruled. As it was evident this motion tended to that, the murmurs against it were loud. It was moved to refer it to the committee of constitution to report on it & carried. Thus it will be brought again before the assembly & some modification will probably take place. Many are of opinion that the confidence des commetans should be the only requisite, but this opinion will certainly not prevail.

## Library of Congress

The committee of judicature have made their report on the reform proposed in that branch. It is inclosed to Mr. Jay. Not long ago I recieved it from the Marquis de la fayette with a desire to read it, make my observations on it in the margin, & return it the next day. I had only time to run it over & make short remarks with little reflexion. I was sorry to be obliged to put pen to paper on that subject in that manner. The next day I saw Mr. Morris who shewed me a copy of what he had written by a like request from M. de la fayette. He had gone much more fully on the subject, but I was glad to find that we had noticed nearly the same parts of the report, & that our objections were much the same. It relieved me from the fear of having exposed my ignorance on the subject. Mr. Morris still continues his proposition to the minister for the purchase of the American debt. His terms are really advantageous. The only difficulty at present is that Mr. Necker exacts security for the performance of the contract, & these gentlemen (Morris & Parker) say their recieving the American debt only in proportion as they deliver the French effects are a sufficient security. M. Necker does not like to commit his reputation of which you know he is very tender by treating with persons

unknown to the public. Shd. the contract not be fulfilled, there wd. be no loss of money, but it wd. shew a want of calculation in the minister thus to err in his idea of the persons with whom he should engage in such an operation. M. Montmorin told me the proposals were highly pleasing to Mr. Necker & that the affair of the security was the only difficulty. Mr. Necker has been for some time very ill. He has begun again however to give audience. Still his friends are very uneasy about him. The stocks have been undergoing for some time past a small diminution. The caisse d'escompte is at present .3670.

I inclose at present to the Secretary of the treasury a return of our commerce with france under the premium of the last year. The result is that from 15th of Feb. to the 1st of Sep. there arrived here 84. Vessels, without counting those that came to Marseilles, those within the direction of Amiens, & those arrived at Dunkerque. For particulars I refer you

## Library of Congress

to the paper inclosed. A letter from M. Bondfield informs me that several vessels have already arrived & are still expected with the last crop from America.

The system of clubs has become general here since your departure. One however which seems to take the ascendant is just opened under the title of the Societe de quatre vingt neuf. Some of the most respectable characters of the assembly are its founders. Strangers are admitted. The Marquis de lafayette & Duke de la Rochefoucauld two of the founders proposed Gt. Washington Dr. Franklin & yourself. My name was added by them also without consulting me on the subject as to myself, or my opinion as to your accepting the place. Several of the members of the assembly having been already rejected by ballot in this club, I fear it will produce parties & discontent among those who were of the same principles & good friends.

It has been a long time since we have had news from America. A paper here had published that R. Island and No. Carolina have adopted the constitution. I suppose it false as to one & premature as to the other. I am in hourly expectation & have been so for some time of the pleasure of hearing from you. I hope you will write often, if it is only two lines. I beg you to remember the pleasure you had when here of recieving a letter from America & centuple it in order to form an idea of my desire to hear from you.

We have had a winder uncommonly mild. The little thermometer which was in the passage is now in the alcove at the foot of your bed. It stands at 51. & has not been lower for several weeks. I beg the favor of you to bring or send me two copies of the Federalist. I suppose you will be at N. York on the reciept of this letter & therefore I do not add my respectful compliments to the young ladies. I hope however you will accept assurances of the unalterable attachment of your friend & servant, W: Short

P.S. Jan. 30. The trial of M. de Besenval was decided partly yesterday, & he was to be set at liberty last night provisoirement without judging the fond de l'affaire. The trial of Favras continues. The two principal witnesses being considered as the denonciateurs it is thought

## Library of Congress

he will not be condemned on the testimony of the other. The mutinous soldiers are also under trial. Their examinations tend to shew that they were not in the secret, but that their disorder was a part of the plan of Favras, who intended to debauch the guard in order to assassinate MM. Bailli & Lafayette & carry the King off to Peronne.

P.S. Jan. 31. 1790. The person who is to carry my letters not setting off till to-day, I have an opportunity of mentioning to you a circumstance which has given me great astonishment. I have in the instant received a letter from our bankers in Holland for the Secretary of the treasury which they desire me to send or forward to him, & to which I refer you. It seems they have on their own account opened a loan of 3 millions of florins. It is evidently from an apprehension that the plan proposed by Mr. Morris for redeeming the American debt should be accepted by the minister. No hint was given me on the subject, & I suppose they were prevented by a certainty that I should not venture to advise such an enterprise & so unnecessarily. They wished therefore that no objections should be made by me, & they quote expressions of mine of which they have changed the nature by generalizing them. Mr. JH. Van Staphorst says he recollects them perfectly & they were different entirely from those stated in the letter to the Secretary of the treasury. They were addressed to Mr. Hubbard in answer to an opinion which he had given that the plan prepared by their house for the purchase of the American debt at a discount of  $11 \frac{2}{3}$  per cent was more for the credit & honor of the United States, than that proposed by Messrs. Morris & Parker for purchasing it at par with French funds. I observed that the commissioners of the U.S. should best know what wd. be most agreeable to Congress in that case. My private opinion was the contrary & I think it probably Mr. Hubbard inferred it. However I observed to him & to all who spoke to me on these subjects that I was determined to remain as passive as possible that Congress might be the less committed, & that I wd. only interfere as I had before done where I apprehended the measure was injurious to the credit & honor of the U.S. The step taken by the bankers has been manifestly in order to force Congress to carry on any operations they wish to undertake respecting the debt to France through their hands. They are certainly supported

## Library of Congress

by Stadnitski. I long much to hear something from America respecting these matters & I hope it will not be long first.

RC (Jefferson Papers, DLC)